

THE PLAIN SPEAKER;

BEING

ARUDE SKETCH OF A REAL CHARACTER,

BY A WORKING CLERGYMAN.

"The amiable and the severe, Mr. Burke's sublime and beautiful, by different proportions, are mixed in every character. Accordingly as either is predominant, men imprint the passions of love or fear. The best punch depends on a proper mixture of sugar and lemon."—*Shenstone*.

"Words must be fitted to a man's mouth; 'twas well said of the fellow that was to make a speech for my Lord Mayor, when he desired to take measure of his lordship's mouth."—*Selden*.

"AND where is your present sphere of labour, Dutton?" was the greeting of one old college friend to another at an accidental rencontre after a separation of some years—"is it agreeable, and likely to be permanent?"

"Both," was the reply: "and though the rector of Melford Abbas,—for such is my locality—would, by some, be deemed a rough character to deal with, to me he has been invariably kind. The way in which I succeeded to the curacy is in perfect keeping with his many and marked peculiarities. In order fully to comprehend the calm, peaceful, and settled character of a curate's life, you must know that in fourteen months I occupied no less than three different curacies. The *first* I lost by the sudden death of my incumbent: the *second* by Mr. Hope's succession to a better living: the *third* by a revocation of a license which compelled my convalescent incumbent to return to residence; and, so situated, he needed the assistance of no curate! I almost made a vow never to seek after a *fourth*.

While my plans for the future were thus completely unsettled, the following letter reached me from my kind and unchanging friend Canon Bartlett;—

“ Lichfield, June 1st, 1830.

“ MY DEAR FRIEND,

“ Mr. Quodmore, the rector of Melford Abbas, has requested me to make inquiries among my clerical brethren for a gentleman who might be disposed to undertake the curacy of his straggling parish.

“ His manners are eccentric; but his heart is no stranger to kindly feelings, as the following circumstances may serve to testify.

“ His late curate, Mr. Remmington, after their connection had lasted—and not in every respect harmoniously—for some years, waited on him to tender his resignation.

“ ‘ Mr. Quodmore I find it my duty to relinquish the curacy.’

“ ‘ On what grounds?’

“ ‘ My health has been for some time failing; and warns me that I can no longer do justice to the important trust reposed in me. I therefore hasten to replace it in your hands.’

“ ‘ I shall not receive it.’

“ ‘ Indeed, sir, I am serious, and’——

“ ‘ So am I.’

“ ‘ You must see, sir, that I am unequal to my duty, and that I had better return home.’

“ ‘ Home, forsooth! do you think that after you have served me some half dozen years in this humbugging, grumbling, blundering, parish, and find yourself amiss for overwork, I shall not do my best to see you restored to good condition? Go to Leamington. See Dr. Jephson. Give up that griping toast-and-water with which you’re like to drink yourself into a dropsy, and take, as a Christian should do, some decent port.’

“ ‘ My good sir,’ said Remmington, overcome by the warmth and earnestness of his manner,—‘ this is impossible for many’——

“ ‘ Don’t interrupt me. I will have my own way for once. I’ve had little enough of it, Heaven

knows, of late. This point I will not yield. There's a bank bill for fifty pounds. When that's gone another will be forthcoming. And remember, I shall not fill up the curacy till Jephson either cures or kills ye. Now not a word. Go home and collect your traps; and to-morrow morning at ten my man shall be at your door in readiness to drive you over to Leamington.'

"These facts I learned from the sufferer's lips a few hours before he died. Quodmore's kindness was unwearyed. He watched over poor Remington with the tenderness and affection of a father over an only child—never quitting him during the last week of his life—and when he was gone, paid all his little debts, observing—'he had been a faithful curate to him; and that no one should have cause to reproach his memory.'

"Such a man as this deserves attention. Lord Anson's frank enables me to inclose a letter of introduction, which I beg you will lose no time in presenting in person.

"Yours always faithfully,

"T. C. BARTLETT."

The trait of character afforded by the anecdote which this letter contained, fixed itself forcibly upon my memory. "I should like to see this man," was my involuntary and half-audible conclusion; and in an hour I was on horseback busily exploring my way across the country to Melford Abbas.* By dint of incessant inquiry and hard riding I at length reached a little, noisy, straggling village with a large pond at one end and a small church with tapering spire at the other. Near the latter was a pretty, white-washed, cottage dwelling, covered with clematis and roses: and encircled by a garden in admirable order and fragrant with odour. Near the house with rake and hoe beside

* It is proper here to state, that to avoid the possibility of wounding private feelings the names of persons and places—the actors in the scene are still living,—have been purposely changed.

him, a huge gardener's knife stuck in his belt, and thick, coarse, undressed, leather gloves on his hands, was a spare middle-aged gentleman working away as busily and diligently as if then and there earning his livelihood as a labourer at half-a-crown a day.

"Good evening, sir."

"Same to you—same to you," was the prompt reply, uttered with singular quickness: but the speaker was intent upon his task and never raised his eyes for an instant from the carnations he was carefully supporting.

"Very fine weather."

"Yes: every goose knows that!"

The answer was sufficiently discouraging if not irritating: but the evening was drawing in; my steed was jaded; and I myself sincerely desirous to reach my journey's end. I stifled therefore the retort upon my lip and persevered. "This is Melford Abbas I presume: where shall I find Mr. Quodmore?"

"My name is Quodmore—pray what is yours?"

I gave it: and placed in his hands, at the same time, my letter of introduction. He took it—turned it over twenty times before he opened it, scanning me most attentively all the time with his grey, restless, inquisitive eyes—broke the seal with a pish that scared away every fly from his well-worn beaver, and when he had finished his missive looked up with a most dissatisfied air, and ejaculated "Well?"

"I have come to you on the business of that letter: but as we cannot discuss the point in the open air if you will send a servant to hold my horse—"

"I keep no servants for any such purpose. You are young and able to do it yourself. I shall send no servant to ye, you may depend upon it. The stables are in that direction, due south. Find your way to them."

"The man is perfectly impracticable," was my mournful conclusion as I dejectedly dismounted in the stable yard. "What an idiot I have been to take such a ride in search of him! Were I only

sure of two hours daylight, and not on a strange cross-country-road, I would trouble neither stable, nor man, nor master more. As it is I must make a merit of endurance."

With anything but a placid brow I returned to the house, where as I learnt by a message conveyed by a servant, Mr. Quodmore was impatiently awaiting me. "Yes," said he after another lengthened and searching survey of my features, "I *think* you are a rational being; I really do think," after another pause, "you possess reason."

"I hope so."

"Because I have been baited almost to death since poor Remmington left me by beings who either had none when they started or lost it on their road to me. For example: A young fellow came here the other day about the curacy. I said to him when he had explained his errand,—'I will attend to ye in five minutes, but I'm just about insuring my life for the benefit of my brother who has chosen to have a wife and eleven children.—What the simpleton's been thinking about has puzzled me these twenty years—and a hundred pounds a-piece will be no bad thing for 'em when I'm gone—my money I've a notion, will do them as much good as my example; and so there's 'Every man his own farrier, to amuse ye in the interim.'"

"Ah! Mr. Quodmore," says he, rising upon his toes and lifting up his deceitful-looking eyes, "you belong to the *homines præposterii*—you are beginning at the wrong end. You ought to be careful for nothing, and to leave all considerations of this kind to his care who feeds the ravens!"—"The ravens!" said I, "Your father was not of that opinion! he did not think so, or you would never have been seated in that den-net with that grinning jackanape in livery perched behind you. The ravens indeed! You ought to be as hoarse as a raven yourself before you uttered such absurdity!"

"Supper was now announced. At its close he decanted a bottle of port with equal judgment and gravity, and after warily sipping about the fifth of a glass, turned the decanter over to me with the remark—

“‘ Now, Sir, what think you of this port ?’

“‘ Determined to meet him on his own ground and to pay him in his own coin, I replied—the liquor bore me out in my statement—

“‘ EXECRABLE !’

“‘ That is your opinion ?’

“‘ It is.’

“‘ Of MY wine ?’

“‘ Yes: if you choose to own it.’

“‘ Ha ! ha ! ha ! Then my heart warms to you from this moment. YOU ARE ONE OF THE FAMILY—the smallest but most genuine family in England—the PLAIN SPEAKERS. Sir, the curacy is yours, if you are pleased to accept it: and all that I can do shall be done to render it agreeable to you.’

“‘ The good understanding we then arrived at has to this hour remained unbroken !’

PLAYFUL WIT.

JAMES SMITH AND SIR GEORGE CRAVEN.

—The following playful colloquy in verse took place at a dinner table, between these two gentlemen, in allusion to Craven-street, Strand, where the former resided :

J. S.—“ At the top of my street the attorneys abound,
And down at the bottom the barges are
found :

Fly, Honesty, fly, to some safer retreat,
For there's craft in the river and craft in the
street.

Sir G. C. “ Why should honesty fly to some safer re-
treat,
From attorneys and barges—od' rot 'em ?—
For the lawyers are JUST at the top of the
street,
And the barges are JUST at the bottom.”